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## **7. Maintaining 'Respect for Spirituality' in a Secular Work Environment: A Biographical Account of the Career-life Journey of a Black Female Practitioner of declared Faith**

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7,990 words excluding 2,377 words for references table, figure etc

### **ABSTRACT**

Today's global environment bears the mark of the beast namely, Volatility Uncertainty Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA). Hence why changes are occurring in the working lives of leaders and employees who now seek to integrate their spirituality at work. Perhaps this is due to society's need for spiritual solutions to better respond to the turbulence triggered by the VUCA climate that has instigated societal, geopolitical and business changes; as a means to enable them to cope and survive. This argues why interest in spirituality, a term viewed as nebulous and with skepticism, is omnipresent and growing. Spirituality discourses span many issues, yet limited written works exist that explore it from an intersectionality perspective, regarding teaching spirituality in management programmes or within businesses. A gap in knowledge of how spirituality impacts on the careers of e.g., women leaders of faith in secular work environments exists. This makes it difficult to ascertain how spirituality manifests in the management practice of such leaders. Furthermore, there is no substantive evidence to show that this issue is explored from the viewpoint of black-female-leaders' who become of faith while in masculine secular environments. This chapter aims to plug these gaps by reviewing the intersectionality of discrimination regarding the sales career-life-journey of Reverend Jessica Meade.

### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

A shift is taking place in both the professional and personal lives of business leaders and employees who now seek to integrate their spirituality and religion at work (Fry & Altman, 2013). Many argue that the reason for this is due to society's need to search for spiritual solutions to better re-

spond to today's global environment, which is one beset by Volatility Uncertainty Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA), resulting in turbulence due to societal, geopolitical and business changes. This turnaround has provided scope to explore the role of spirituality in moulding the way businesses organise their resources and lead and manage their people ( Fry & Altman, 2013). Consequently, "we are now witnessing a rapidly rising wave of interest in spirituality in management", a topic of major significance to enterprise leaders (Schmidt-Wilk, Heaton, & Steingard, 2000; Sass, 2000; Burack, 1999).

Globalization's has rendered organizations more heterogeneous than they used to be. This phenomenon has changed workforces that now yield employees of different genders, cultures and spiritual faith. Some reflect more than one of these characteristics or inter-related axes of identity, such as those belonging to marginalized groups...

### **7.1.1 Issues of intersectionality**

Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality described as "the interaction of multiple identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination" (Davis, (2008). Crenshaw recognised how feminist literature viewed race and gender "as mutually exclusive categories of experiences and analysis" so decided to focus her work on black women to "compare the multidimensionality" of their "experience with the single-axis analysis that misrepresents these experiences".

Crenshaw demonstrated how black-women are theoretically erased due to the tendency to investigate single entities of either 'blacks' or 'women' instead of acknowledging the existence of 'black-women' as a singular group worthy to be explored from a double-axes perspective. This innovative approach is why 'intersectionality' is acknowledged as one of the most significant contributions of feminist literature. However, confusion regarding its meaning makes it difficult to know how it should be applied (Davis, 2008).

Lutz, Vivar & Supik (2011) acknowledged the significance of the accusations made by black feminists against their white bourgeois counterparts, who only mentioned issues that relate to the oppressive experiences of those of simile to discuss matters of feminine politics. Hence why black women's reality was destined to be ignored, arguing the need to capture and analyse the multidimensional nature and complexity of 'their' lived experiences including their spirituality (ibid). Recognition of these multi-

ple identities in the workplace, arguably would aid their integration that would enable leaders to know how they are lived in practice and within the professional paradigm.

### **7.1.2`Mind the gaps` - Spirituality teachings, implications and ensuing questions**

“Although the literature on spirituality in management and the management of spirituality has burgeoned” over the years, “little has been written on teaching about spirituality in management courses or in business organizations” (Barnett, Krell, & Sendry, 2000). However, “although the literature on teaching spirituality in management is growing, little empirical research on theory or practices has yet been published” (Pandey & Gupta, 2008). Therefore, many organizations still remain ignorant of issues regarding workplace spirituality, particularly from the viewpoint of female leaders of faith employed in male dominated secular environments. This chapter explores this notion.

The growth in attention to spirituality “in the theory and practice of management, the field of management education” is beginning to pose questions like, “what is spirituality? What are model programs for teaching spirituality? (Pandey & Gupta, 2008).

### **7.1.4: Spirituality as a human perspective and reasons for gaps in the literature**

“Spirituality’ is said to be an existential search for meaning and purpose in human life and the role and feeling of linkage within the larger scheme of existence” (Pandey, & Gupta, 2008). Discussions regarding this topic tend to focus on issues that relate to either academia or the workplace. But how does spirituality impact on the careers of female leaders of faith employed in the secular world in male dominated work environments? This question would be difficult to answer without insight to written evidence of empirical studies that explore spirituality practices and theory, but this is lacking (Pandey & Gupta, 2008).

Skeptics believe spirituality “betokens matters of the spirit world of animism, ecstasy, magic and spells” (Flanagan & Jupp, 2007)”, hence limited tolerance for its ideals in the workplace. “Spirituality refers to an apparently “incoherent collection of ideas and practices” (Houtman & Aupers, 2007). It draws on “multiple traditions, styles, and ideas simultaneously, combining them into idiosyncratic packages”, hence its branding

as the “pick-and-mix” or “the do- it-yourself religion” (Hamilton, 2000; Baerveldt, 1996). This suggests spirituality is associated with those eager to indulge in the realms of a “spiritual supermarket” (Lyon, 2000) gorging themselves to subliminal sickness on an abundance of “religious consumption à la carte” (Possamai, 2003).

Sociology itself “a member of the humanities, is called to affirm matters of the spirit” and “in doing so it confronts a conundrum peculiar to the discipline” (ibid).

What is evident however, is that spirituality is a new workplace concept that is both subtle and complex, which is why it is difficult to write about (Ashmos and Duchon, Wright, 2000) Although the 1988 Education Reform Act acknowledges “the importance of spirituality within education, the realities tend to deny scope for much work in this area”. Nonetheless, it would be “premature to speak or write about spirituality in business in the present climate of hedonistic egotism”, (Chakraborty, Kurien, Singh, Athreya, Maira, Aga and Gupta, 2004). Furthermore, management “do not understand spirituality so should avoid the need to reduce the concept “ “down to their “ low-level consciousness” (ibid).

However, one might ask whether spirituality has anything to do with “its authentic location in the hinterland of the individual where the self finds its ultimate destination?” (Flanagan & Jupp, 2007); this chapter attempts to answer this question by reviewing the working life of Reverend Jessica Meade, a British born black female leader of declared faith, employed in the secular male dominated business-to-business sales world.

#### **7.1.4 Overview of chapter and introduction summary**

This chapter begins with a review of literature to explore the notion of spirituality from an intersectionality of discrimination perspective regarding gender, race, and declared religiosity concerning workplace leadership. The findings captured from the stories told by the research subject regarding her career experiences as a black female leader of declared faith. These findings provided insight to how the research subject maintained her spirituality in a male dominated secular environment, fraught with discrimination. Insights were gained from other leaders of faith regarding their experiences of simile to identify the implications.

The concluding discussions related to different aspects of spirituality in a work context such as human psychology, organisational behaviour, diver-

sity management, values and faith. These discussions provide scope for critical review and analysis followed by recommendations identified from the findings, to promote awareness of spirituality and intersectionality and its implication at work.

## 7.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 7.2.1 Intersectionality and self-righteousness

*“Intersectionality* designates the disadvantages that women experience. This is because their gender category is so closely associated with other disadvantageous social categories” (Banton, 2011), such as, their spirituality. The connection between religious beliefs and spirituality to women and leadership is prevalent in Black American history akin to the role of the spirit in promoting socialisation in the workplace (Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010).

Witherspoon & Taylor (2010) conducted a study, drawing on notions of religio-spirituality based on a narrative analysis of the stories of four Black female school principals in the USA. These stories provided insight to the topic of self-righteousness regarding “the conviction that one’s beliefs and actions are correct” compared with “the alternative beliefs and actions of others” (Falbo & Shepperd, 1986). This concept (self-righteousness) is at epidemic proportions not only in the US, but across the globe (ibid). Furthermore, perhaps it is a means for dealing with the challenges endured due to multiple identities in the workplace, which can be nourished by spiritual and religious beliefs. Nevertheless, Witherspoon & Taylor’s review of the intersectionality of gender, race, and religio-spirituality made evident the relationship of past and present understandings, regarding religio-spiritual leadership, topics explored in this chapter.

Intersectionality is recognised in the literature as a valuable analytical tool for examining issues of differences among women and although its growing use is stimulating, it is important to be cautious when utilising the concept, because it is often used ambiguously and inconsistently (Jordan-Zachery, 2007). . Arguably, self-righteousness is a means for dealing with multiple identities nourished by religious and spiritual beliefs. Moreover, although each identity brings with it a different contextual perspective, what is required is the harmonised stable inner core of the self that acts as a guide for shaping the kinds of behaviours or actions regarded as correct

compared to that of others aligned with the notion of selfrighteousness (Falbo & Shepperd, 1986). Selfrighteousness therefore helps to demystify and simplify multiple identities, which in itself can be exhausting as each identity can ask different things resulting in ambiguity and stress that can hinder career success and fulfilment. This further argues a need to integrate simplification to aid clarity and for promoting wellbeing across different paradigms of one's life.

Reverend Meade is a second generation Caribbean born to parents from the West Indies. Banton (2011) explored this generational perspective when discussing the shift in relations between the black and white communities in England in the late 1950s when Reverend Meade was born. Banton argues that at the time, the indigenous community assumed people who hailed from the British colonies such as the Caribbean, came to the UK only to visit or to study. But independence meant they were not visiting but settling. This changed the relational dynamics between the white community and the blacks' colonial immigrants forcing the English to re-think their nationality. For some this change was difficult to accept resulting in racism. Xenophobia was more challenging for those BME settlers who represented other marginalised groups such as those with disabilities and people of spiritual-faith. Discriminative mindsets today are more subtle akin to a virus evolving "into a new form that is difficult to recognise and harder to combat" (Mistry & Latoo, 2009). Furthermore, discrimination in the workplace is "negatively associated with various indicators of well-being" (Deitch, Barsky, Butz, Chan, Brief & Bradley, 2003). Makkonen (2002), acknowledged that "the right of all persons to equality before the law and protection against discrimination" is what "constitutes a universal human right" recognized by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The UDHR can either focus on numerous grounds of discrimination, such as gender, disability, race or ethnicity; or, alternatively on one in particular. The notion though "has been that people are, or can be, discriminated against mainly on the grounds of one factor at a time". This suggests that each of these grounds can be addressed separately legally and politically. However, more recently, there is recognition that this is not the whole story, as individuals can represent more than one disadvantaged group all at the same time, and can suffer various forms of discrimination simultaneously, termed "multiple" or "intersectional" discrimination.

As Makkonen (2002) recognized, the concept of intersectional discrimination has far from utilized its potential for four main reasons; 1) the meaning of the term still remains abstract perhaps due to the predominant aca-

demic discussion of the topic; 2) human rights organizations' have a tendency to focus on only one ground of discrimination at a time; 3) the concept has only recently been taken into account and is slowly making a breakthrough in the international rights forum; 4) only a few human rights organizations and governments acknowledge it let alone take action. This renders issues of intersectional discrimination an underdeveloped area.

### **7.2.2 Spirituality – A historical perspective and further debates**

The world has witnessed “the birth, proliferation, and death of countless religions, belief systems, and philosophies” (Hatcher, 1979-1983) that were not devoid of psychological and cultural factors and a shared belief that “man in his naturally given human state” is neither whole or complete until he is able to undergo the process of 'salvation' to achieve spiritual life (Hatcher, 1979-1983). Spirituality is “the essence of the human condition - the keystone of a certain vision of reality” (Zsolnai, 2011) that forbids hypocrisy (ibid).

Such concepts exemplify spiritual meanings and their philosophies as the sine qua non of spiritual existence. Spiritual development today, is fraught with challenges yet it is both valuable and important to organisational success via the retention of talented believers such as Reverend Jessica Meade.

“Many believe that personal spirituality can be developed outside of religion” (University of Maryland, 2011). However, “one should not use spirituality to develop his or her corporate reputation”, nor should it be perceived as “the last resort solution for management problems” (Zsolnai, 2011). Instead it needs to be recognised for what it is – “a free, non-utilitarian option” (ibid).

Exploring the career life journey of Reverend Jessica Meade provides opportunity to gain further insights to the implications of spirituality in the workplace from an intersectionality of discrimination viewpoint.

### **7.2.3 Spirituality definitions**

Today there is growing interest in workplace spirituality, a concept discussed from many viewpoints and defined in numerous ways so no singu-



lar definitive description exists (Krishnakumar & Neck, 2002). Definitions range from intelligence, inner experience, and the highest level of any development line (Pandey & Gupta, 2008); a higher order greater than oneself, a consciousness of the purpose and a need to develop personal, absolute values (University of Maryland, 2011).

These definitions make evident that spirituality focuses on the divine to seek understanding to “live out” key values for achieving personal fulfillment and inner peace.

### 7.2.3 Common discussion themes in spirituality

Spirituality discourses focus on spirituality at work regarding performance and organisational effectiveness (Karakas, 2010). Or, on management and leadership issues, such as Pruzan (cited in Laszlo, 2011), work who believes **“recent developments in the theory and practice of management can be better understood and integrated into personal and organisational behaviour via spirituality as the context for purposeful behaviour”**. This suggests organisations can gain from spirituality.

Furthermore, “the enormous, recent attention to matters of the spirit in both the academic and practitioner communities”, has resulted in a shift in “management thinking away from its traditional models and paradigms toward” one based on “a wholly new spiritual imperative” (Barnett, Krell, & Sendry, 2000; Delbecq, 1999; Bolman & Deal, 1995). The growth in interest in spirituality in the workplace is also evident on the shelves of bookshops and virtual bookstores as discovered by Karakas (2010) who identified “around 1780” via Google Book and 2100 titles on Amazon.com.

In America, around 10,000 prayer groups meet regularly in the workplace, while in Europe, religious influences in leadership and in the organisation has declined “as secularisation has increased, yet spirituality has emerged as its successor” (Western, 2013). Spirituality is “traditionally rooted in religion” therefore leaders of faith are likely to value and seek solace in their spiritual beliefs to buttress their roles and for gaining respect.

A recent study that explored cultural meanings of respect recognized as a core value for all; showed that a lack of awareness of what respect means

can result in disharmony (Wilson, 2012). People tend to give others their respect and expect their respect back without realizing that respect in one culture can be disrespect in another. Therefore, when disrespect occurs the assumption is it was deliberate when this might not be the case (ibid).

The deficit caused by a “lack of understandings of personal and professional values” leads to a lack of true awareness of a person’s “inner driving forces, their short- and long-term purposes in life, and the ways in which spirit and body contribute to the growth (or death) of social organizations and society” (Barnett, Krell, & Sendry, 2000).

Krishnakumar, & Neck, (2002) asked “why is there such an increased interest in spirituality in the workplace?” They believe this is due to societal changes regarding the demise of leisure time and advancements in technology. They argue that these changes have resulted in employees “desire to experience spirituality not only in their personal lives, but also in their work”, where they “spend a large amount of time in environments that have become more unfriendly (Ray, 1992; Neck & Milliman, 1994; Moore-Davis, 2007).

Sharma, (2004) believes “no discussion of spirituality can be complete without discussing their spiritual substitutes - wealth and success”, which trigger similar emotional feelings and wellbeing.

## **7.3 METHODOLOGY**

### **7.3.1: A narrative research approach**

This study builds on previous bigger research (2006-2012) undertaken to explore cultural meanings of respect. This was based on diverse cohorts of final-year undergraduate business students of multiple identities, who were recognised as future business cadre. This earlier study provided insight to these research participants’ (some of whom were leaders and entrepreneurs), spirituality and beliefs regarding self-righteousness, in the classroom and the workplace. A significant number of the participants (215) were religious faith-based spiritual believers i.e., Christians (98) Muslims (35) Hindus (31), Buddhists (24), Jewish (16), Sikhs (5), Baha’I (4), Shinto (2). While 12 were Atheists.

Nonetheless, a narrative approach was adopted for this qualitative study [that refers “to research approaches or tools” (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013) utilized by “researchers to design collect and analyze their data” (ibid). Narrative analysis is what Humpreys & Brown, (2008) describe “as specific, coherent, creative re-descriptions of the world, authored by participants who draw on the (generally broad, multiple and heterogeneous) discursive resources locally available to them”. Organizational narratives are peoples’ accounts created based on their experience and understanding of these experiences retold “in ways which maintain and objectify ‘reality’ (Humpreys & Brown, 2008). As part of the sense-making process, the researcher’s role is to adequately recognize and analyze not only the meaning of the language used by the research subjects to tell their stories, but to examine the emergent polyphōnia or voice-tones that can provide insight to the significance of the experience on their well-being at work. This also relates to the voice-tones of the organisation players described by the research subjects that acknowledge the role that language plays, which Fairclough, (1989), regards as “the primary medium of social control and power”.

The study was interpretivist in nature, which is not always an easy task because “qualitative research often lacks transparency in relation to the analytical processes employed, which hinders the ability of the reader to critically appraise the study’s findings” Maggs-Rapport, (2001). This was why it was important to consider this weakness in the design of the methodology to provide clarity and to ensure that this chapter was well sign-posted so that readers can journey through the world of the research subjects to decide whether their stories are legitimate research endeavours (Koch, 1998). Stories about workplace lived experiences provides insight to the overall health of an organisation (Snowden, 1999).

### **7.3.1 Research design and procedure**

This study included 78 informal semi-structured research interviews that were conducted once or twice a week mainly on Friday evenings for convenience, from April 2012 to March 2015. The interview subjects chose a discrete accessible venue where it was unlikely that we would be interrupted. The duration of these interviews varied from 60-120 minutes with a median length of approximately 75 minutes. These research interviews, a common method used in qualitative studies, (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008), related to broad open-ended leading questions that led to the identification of the nine themes or research codes;

1. Career sector roles and responsibilities
2. Feelings and emotions
3. Workplace challenges
4. Personal values
5. How workplace challenges were addressed
6. Advantages of spirituality at work
7. Disadvantages of spirituality at work
8. Perceptions and attitudes (theirs and others)
9. Importance of Spirituality at work

### **7.3.2 Case context: The research subject**

The subject was a suitable intersectionality candidate as she is a British born black female of Caribbean parentage of spiritual faith. The subject possesses more than thirty years work experience in a male dominated sales environment and became of faith after she joined and excelled as a leader in the sales publishing field. Her status and experience meant she could provide insight to spirituality in the workplace from an intersectionality perspective. This relates to the “relationships among multi-dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations” a tool used by anti-racist academics and feminists for theorising oppression and identity (McCall, 2014; Nash, 2008).

### **7.3.3 Data collection: research methods, instruments**

#### *7.3.3.1 Story-telling*

The various stories told by the research subjects regarding their work-place experiences, enabled the researcher to better understand their “acute exacerbation events beyond the biophysical” (Bailey & Tilley, 2002), regarding the ‘spirit’. These narations based on the participants accounts and how it affected them, were analysed for coherence and for making sense of their world via creative re-descriptions, aligned to a narrative analysis approach (Humphreys & Brown, 2008).

Stories comes with various indices as ‘touch points’ connected to people that cause implicit or explicit awareness, emotional connection and understanding in their minds (Woodside, 2010). The stories told that instigate change that in turn “spawns stories” (Brown, Gabriel & Gherardi, 2009), were audio-recorded and played back to the subjects for clarity to confirm accuracy and to gain their approval. This helped to achieve triangulation.

However, it was necessary to recognize that stories can also “block change” ” (Brown, Gabriel & Gherardi, 2009), as well as define what constitutes change (ibid).

### 7.3.3.2 Observation

The researcher did not just listen to the stories told by the research subjects, but recognized that further supportive data could be gained from observing their non-verbal communicative behavior throughout the story-telling process. Directly observing human behavior as a research technique is one widely used in behavioral science research “considered superior to other methods” (Suen & Ary, 2014).

This method encompasses a broad range of practices and techniques and the observed data can be collated via the use of various tools such pencil-and-paper (Suen & Ary, 2014). What is regarded as an observation is often complicated by the “frequent use of the term *observed data* to represent any empirical data, regardless of how the data was required” (Suen & Ary, 2014). Moreover, “in addition to whatever genetic endowment each individual is born with, the major influence on behaviour is each person’s moment-by-moment experiences as he or she goes through life” (Johnston & Pennypacker, 2011).

## 7.4 Data analysis

A narrative approach was adopted to analyze the research data to identify how Reverend Meade dealt with workplace challenges, their impact and to ascertain how she used her faith to cope.

The ‘linguistic turn’ in the social sciences has been useful for “directing attention towards the preconditions for action, as well as those actions understood as speech acts” (Neumann, 2002). This helped to make sense of the narratives making evident that language is a type of social practice that comprise of social identities and interactive situations between individuals or groups of people (Humphrey & Brown, 2008).

The data sources were subjected to a form of thematic analysis based on how the research subjects organised their narrative structures to give account of their experiences (Humphreys & Brown, 2008). This process helped to identify the emergent story-telling themes as coded categories,

regarding the central characters, the plots, the incidences, actions and motivations (ibid).

#### Quality assurance

Quality was a primary focus throughout this study, so the narratives were read back to the research subjects for accuracy, clarity and approval as a means for guiding the research and for developing the received wisdom (Gaskell & Bauer, p.336, 2002). Although the research subject approved the use of their real names in this study, the researcher agreed to their request to ensure that the Individuals and organisations referred to were anonymised to maintain confidentiality, which helped to win their trust. This enabled the research subject and contributors to feel relaxed to be open and honest with their responses both verbally and non-verbally as observed.

Although some scientists believe observation as a method has little to contribute (Black, 1996), it compliments narrative analysis that in turn helped to identify the impact of Revd Jessica Meade's workplace experiences, on her feelings emotions and perceptions. Furthermore, this helped to verify that communicative validation, thick description and triangulation were reached via "critical interpretive methodologies that show citizens how to confront the obstacles to justice that shape their daily lives" (Denzin, 2012). For example, the researcher would probe for clarity and would encourage the subjects to explain what happened in detail, the impact these experiences had on them, why they believed they were restrictive and unjust and how they felt such experiences could be addressed. Moreover, triangulation is a useful tool for cross-validation "when two or more distinct methods are found to be congruent and yield comparable data" (Jick, 1979).

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the questions Reverend Jessica Meade was asked that give insight to the research themes. Her responses (translated verbatim) emerged naturally from her narratives, evident throughout. These stories afforded the research participants the opportunity to understand their experience, legitimize their behavior and share their emotions felt with others. Managed purposeful stories provide powerful mechanism for the disclosure of knowledge assets within organizations (Holloway & Freshwater, 2007; Snowden, 1999).

Insert Table1 here

## 7.5 FINDINGS

### 7.5.1: Career sector: roles and responsibilities

Reverend Meade's first experience of sales was in the 1970s while working in a shoe shop. She then developed a "desire to sell clothes" before deciding to start her own business. This was when she discovered her "entrepreneurial prowess", which led to her involvement in multilevel marketing where she had line-management responsibility of various sales teams. The satisfaction gained from these early experiences was the catalyst to Jessica's full-time career in sales back in the mid-1980s.

#### *A leap of faith*

Shortly after joining the profession she encountered a smartly dressed well-spoken young Caucasian woman evangelising in the street. Although Jessica was not religious she was intrigued by "the messenger" who did not reflect the Pentecostal image depicted by the kinds of street evangelists she normally came across. However, while observing this woman, she could not help wondering "why on a Friday evening was she was not in the pub drinking?" This Jessica said was a cultural norm for many employees in the area recognised as a vital part of the British way of life (House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sports Committee, 2007).

As Jessica approached the woman began to read her "a scripture from the bible that described murderers, thieves and liars in the same light". This she said "made me aware of the lies that I was expected to tell in my job to 'seal the deal'" a term used in the sales profession for persuading a client to buy. She added "this was something, I did not feel comfortable doing" nor "did I connect these lies with spirituality until shown the scripture that highlighted the consequences." This "pricked at my conscience and made me want to know what else was written in the bible."

Jessica was raised in the Catholic faith by her St. Lucian parents, but was never encouraged to read the bible. St. Lucia is a small island located in the Caribbean that was ruled alternatively by the French and the British until the French conceded in 1814 (St. Lucia Tourist Board, 2012). Christianity is the dominant religion with more than 85% of the nation being Roman Catholics.

The young evangelist persuaded Jessica to enrol for bible classes where she joined other professionals “who did not compromise their Christian way of life”, which Jessica found “fascinating”. She was then assigned a disciple to guide her through her Christian journey of discovery. This culminated in her being baptised.

### **7.5.2 Feelings**

The faraway look and contented smile on Jessica’s face while recalling her baptism could be described as one of tranquillity and delight particularly when accompanied by the change in her voice level, which became more high-pitched. This intonation is referred to by Auer & Luzio, (1992), “as the perceived temporal organisation of predominantly pitch in speech”.

Jessica then described what happened when she arrived for work the Monday morning after her Sunday baptism, “I was still filled with excitement, and was eager to share my good news with my boss the Director in the firm”. He responded by swearing - telling “me to f--k off!” Jessica brought all five digits of her right hand to a point used to prod the middle of her stomach while raising her shoulders as she widened her eyes to express how her Director’s words made her feel. She said it was like a hard body blow that made her feel “dejected and physically sick”. His response challenged her self- righteousness based on her spiritual beliefs regarding what she knows to be right that in comparison, her Director views as wrong or at least at odds with his own beliefs about spirituality (Falbo & Shepperd, 1986). Jessica recalled the “look of disgust and disappointment etched on his face, which she said, really affected me!”

She recalled the “high” felt when she left work the Friday before her baptism as “I had doubled my number of sales that week” a success that Sharma (2004), describes as a “spiritual substitute”. This was followed by her baptism on the Sunday hence the double high quickly followed by the “double blow” felt when her boss responded negatively and disrespectfully to her good news.

Jessica said she did not want to be a hypocrite, nor “did I want to lie, which was why I decided to tell my boss about my baptism”. As Zsolnai, (2011) warned “hypocrisy is forbidden in the field” of spirituality, but Jessica soon realised that “lying was an integral part of the organisation’s culture”. This experience affected her morale so she became less motivated



and **less** effective in the job suggesting that a lack of respect for employees' key values such as their spirituality, can affect their performance. Akin to her other personal identities, Revd Meade recognized that it was important for her to fulfil her spiritual identity needs in order for her to feel contented; hence the need for the integration of simplification to promote wellbeing at work.

### **7.5.3 Workplace challenges**

Jessica endured further challenges when her colleagues were informed that she had become a 'Christian'. She remembered how they sarcastically referred to her as "the Reverend". Or, "pick-up" on what they regarded as Christian faux pas' to ask sarcastically, "I thought you were a Christian?" She admitted that this behaviour made her feel angry, but at the time she was unsure how to deal with it.

Although Jessica was shocked by the way she was treated by her colleagues in that first week after her baptism, she continued to attend bible classes, but then agreed to join her colleagues for a drink in the pub that Friday. However, when she entered the building something strange happened, "it was as though a bright light had suddenly flashed before my eyes that made me reel backwards and take stock of where I was. I felt offended by being there (in the pub) so I decided to leave". She believed this experience was a spiritual message from God that enabled her to draw on her selfrighteous beliefs, which was a reminder that this was something she was not prepared to compromise; to extricate herself from the situation.

### **7.5.4 Personal values**

At the time Jessica was in emotional turmoil because of how she was feeling about the two things she valued most - her faith and her career. She said there was "too much contradiction between the two, so I realised that I needed to retreat by taking time out to think" and to "talk to God confirming that like my faith, I also love my job and don't want to leave." She was seeking spiritual guidance so that she could "maintain her faith and her job without having to compromise either". This need to retreat into selfrighteousness to draw on her spiritual faith was Revd Meade's way of attempting to stabilise her inner core as a means for demystifying and simplifying

the intersectionality of personal identities as a black female leader of spiritual faith, and the demands and challenges that come with them.

When she returned to work, a colleague she did not notice before caught her attention. She said “as I listened to him I realised how skilful he was at selling business. For me it was like a form of art.” She added that “I knew I wanted to sell like him instead of ‘blagging’ which is often the case in my industry”. Blagging is when you try to mask uselessness, which can be detrimental if exposed (Black, 2005).

This colleague became Jessica’s mentor before leaving to join another firm inviting her to do the same. She saw this as an opportunity to start afresh so decided to be open about her Christianity from the onset, explaining that she did not want to do anything that would compromise her faith. Her new employers responded by saying all that matters was her ability “to put figures on the board” referring to successful sales outcomes.

#### **7.5.5 The challenges continue**

*“Stand-up the Reverend has entered the room!”*

Jessica confirmed that it was at this firm that she was mocked the most where “the mockery came mainly from my peers, but in this new firm it was the Sales Director who took the lead encouraging others to follow suit.” When asked how this mocking manifested, she said “they would laugh when I walked in and say sarcastically, “we’d better stand up as the Reverend has entered the room!” Furthermore “they asked me to work on projects they thought would challenge my faith, but her selfrighteousness meant she found the confidence to ‘stand’ firmly by her spiritual beliefs. Yet, “when I refused they would accuse me of for instance, being homophobic, which was not the case.”

*Not another tart, they keep sending us tarts and they never make it!*

Other challenges include the time when on her first day in media sales, prior to being baptised when “I was walking across the sales floor. One of the men watching me shouted at the top of his voice “not another tart, they keep sending us tarts and they never make it!” She was also asked (which she believed was because she was black), whether she would try and get her “bro’s a job in the firm”, referring to black men. These comments made Jessica aware that even though she regards herself as British, the

colour of her skin meant she was unlikely to be accepted as British by many of her white colleagues.

*Adopting an accent in an attempt to mimic a black person*

Jessica recalled the time she accused her boss of “being racist due to a comment he made”. He responded by bending backwards with arms outstretched glancing wide-eyed to the sky before adopting an accent in an attempt to mimic a black person as he asked (referring to God), “where is he?” He then beckoned with his fingers to conclude challengingly, “bring it on!” Jessica knew that her boss’s actions were not only racist, but was an attempt to mock her faith.

*“I was once a Christian but I am now a Muslim!”*

On one occasion her colleagues photocopied the book of John from the bible to leave on her desk. This was accompanied with an article headlined, “I was once a Christian but I am now a Muslim!” Jessica believed this was meant to ridicule her faith. She also recalled the time a colleague she accused of “being duplicitous” arrived at work the next day wearing a Tee-Shirt with the words “Jesus can’t skate” emblazoned on the front in an attempt to mock her.

### **7.5.6 Emotions**

These incidences evoked negative emotions such as anger and humiliation triggered when events occur that cause concern (Frijda, 1986) that can be outwardly recognized such as the pensive furrowed brow look displayed on Jessica’s face. Other women suffered a similar fate such as Jessica’s colleague whose image was deemed masculine who was humiliated on her first day when a male manager asked loudly when she arrived “Is it a man is it a plane? Whatever it is, I don’t want it on my team!” Overt racism, sexism and spiritualism were commonplace workplace practices in this organisation. Collins (1998), describes ‘race’, class and gender as interlocking systems of oppression. Arguably, this kind of cruelty is likely to be even greater when spirituality is added to the mix. Such discriminatory behaviors breach equality laws such as that specified in the Equality Act 2010 (legislation.gov.uk, 2010).

*Suffering in silence*

Employees who suffer workplace discrimination feel they have no other choice but to suffer in silence rather than risk losing their jobs. For most, work is a never-ending struggle a place where they are constantly expected to prove their worth. This instills suspicion and a need to keep watch just in case there are others around waiting to impede their efforts and accomplishments or pretend not to notice them to avoid giving them credit (McKnight, 1984).

Many victims of discrimination fear repercussions if they complain, opting instead for a less painful expedient option, by resigning from their positions (Wilson, 2010), so organisations run the risk of losing talented competent staff.

### **7.5.7 How workplace challenges were addressed**

#### *Negativity as drivers of success*

Jessica said “being black, female and a Christian, meant my ridicule was three-fold”. Yet, she was determined to draw on these experiences to succeed in her male dominated industry. “I am the type of person who tends to use negativity as drivers to success, she said. Furthermore, “it is utopian to conceive of a life without negative experiences” (Lopez, 2008), but one way of dealing with them is to draw on positive emotions to reappraisal them so that positive states and traits can be accentuated (ibid). For Revd Meade, such positive emotions are evoked by an ability to harmonise her intersectionality born of multiple identities. This is aided by her selfrighteous beliefs, that affords her inner stability and peace to cope with these and other challenges endured in today’s VUCA environment beset with adversity and austerity measures.

Moreover, utilising positive emotions and a selfrighteous approach, paid dividends for Jessica because as her “success grew the mockery began to subside”. She said, “I progressed from being just a good performer to one of the top three ‘players’ and the only female recognised on the ‘player’ board displayed for all to see”. Jessica attributes her success to her faith and faith teachings such as, to “have a desire to achieve more than the norm”. She was later ordained as a Reverend. The Church “ordained 490 new clergy (221 women and 269 men) in 2012” (Archbishops Council, 2015). An Office for National Statistics 2011 survey (Fig. 1) showed that

those of religious beliefs from a Black, African, Caribbean or Black British background represented only 3.3 of the UK population (56,075,912).

Insert Figure 1 here

### **7.5.8 `Advantages and disadvantages of spirituality at work**

Jessica said “the advantages of my spirituality enabled me to overcome my workplace challenges, such as when I felt like giving up. I would read a relevant scripture from the bible such as Philopians 4:13 where it says, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”, which helped her to cope.

Jessica said a workplace disadvantage was “being open about my faith” such as when she was training a new recruit prior to him being placed on the sales floor. As usual, she referred to parables regarding historical figures such as David who slay Goliath, as an example of an icon of success. The intention was to motivate new recruits to do their best. Jessica said “although I referred to other non-Christian parables, this person decided to complain about the Christian one” suggesting that for some, faith at work is still a taboo.

Jessica realised that “although my sales prowess has always been respected, I have never been respected for my faith, ethnicity or for being a woman”, which affected her self-esteem and wellbeing.

#### *Those who endured similar experiences*

Joan Poorman, another leader of faith endured similar experiences. She works as a Client Manager and Senior Recruitment Consultant for a medical healthcare agency. Like Jessica, Joan is experienced in sales where she said the focus is “about making the quick `buck` and using methods” of choice “to put the numbers on the board”. Joan admits that she finds this approach “challenging to my spirituality” as “one is often required to use underhand methods to make money.”

#### *Perceptions and attitudes*

Joan said “spirituality often conjures thoughts of ‘New Age’ philosophies around belief systems and perceptions of the darker side such as the occult”, which arguably makes it difficult for employers to accept is something that could be good for business.

Nonetheless, Joan said her “faith is number one priority” as “it is inextricably linked with what I do and how I do it and I have become more aware of how I am being led by the holy-spirit in my work.” This belief resonates with another faith leader, Reverend Esme Beswick MBE who said the holy-spirit is the guiding light in her work and is at the basis of her performance and success.

#### *Importance of Spirituality at work*

Joan recalled the “times when I felt my faith was being compromised by expectations in the job that challenged my faith ethics.” When asked how she dealt with such challenges, Joan said she refused to comply. Her employers responded by taking away her “responsibilities, which at the time were quite senior”. However, they “soon realised how skilled I was at the job when they could not find anyone else good enough to replace me”. This is why she now has two job titles and dual responsibilities. Joan believes her faith “had a hand in this outcome”.

She said as a believer working in an environment where being truthful to candidates who take for granted that “I will be able to find them work” is a struggle. For example “I know I can’t place those with poor language skills” so one way of coping with such scenarios is to “reconnect with my faith in prayer.”

The insights gained from these spiritual life stories, demonstrates that negative perceptions of spirituality can result in negative attitudes towards those of faith in the workplace. However, positive beliefs about spirituality can be used by those of faith to foster positive workplace learning outcomes.

#### **7.7.9 Analysis of findings**

### *Story-telling narratives*

The participants' stories afforded them power to shape their world and identity as their stories emerged (Holloway & Freshwater, 2007). Stories begin with life situations such as arriving at work to discover that everything is fine so we expect things to continue in this way until a crisis occurs that throws this life as we know it out of balance (McKee, R & Fryer, 2011), akin to those shared by Reverend Jessica Meade.

A good storyteller is able to describe what was going on and how they were able to deal with the forces of challenge. The mockery that Reverend Meade experienced made her realise how she was perceived as a leader of faith. These experiences invoked feelings of anger and humiliation. But as Jessica confirmed it was "my spirituality" that "enabled me to overcome my workplace challenges" as agreed by Joan Poorman, which they used as a coping strategy. Organisational stories are mechanisms for disclosing the intellectual and knowledge assets, and the organisation's rights and wrongs (Snowden, 1999).

Story-telling is an important communication tool that influences organisation learning and enables storytellers to supplement individual memories with institutional memory (Yiannis, 2000; Vance 1991; Boje, 2008). Moreover, story-tellers are able to reflect on their experiences and call on their protagonist of self to describe how they worked with a situation, made difficult decisions, took action and explain how they discovered the truth (McKee, R & Fryer, 2011). Illustrious storytellers such as Shakespeare also endured the fundamental conflict between subjective expectation and cruel reality (ibid).

### *Observations*

Observing the behavioural manifestations displayed by the research participants while sharing their stories of spiritual faith, made evident how they would become more expressive and animated when discussing those experiences that had the greatest impact on their confidence and wellbeing. This was mitigated with long pauses and periods of silent reflection, which further compounded the impact of these experiences. The researcher recognised that "basing evidence on direct observation and collecting it in an objective and unbiased way" are "key tenets of empirical research" (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls & Ormston (p. 9, 2013).

## 7.6 CONCLUDING DISCUSSIONS

### 7.6.1 Exploring intersectionality and self-righteousness – a coping mechanism

Several key discussion points emerged from the literature and from the stories told by the research participants, suggesting that much can be gained from exploring inter-related intersections. Lutz, Vivar & Supik (2011) recognised the tendency to explore the oppressive experiences of white middle-class women, while the life of their disadvantaged black-female counterparts, were being ignored. This further supports the need to investigate the multidimensional nature and complexity of black women's lives including their spirituality (ibid).

Intersectionality is rendered an appropriate tool to examine issues of differences, however, it is used inconsistently and is underutilized (Makko-nen, 2002; Jordan-Zachery, 2007). Perhaps this is due to difficulties accepting its suitability for exploring the lives of disadvantaged women with multiple identities, which should be investigated from a mutually inclusive singular perspective instead of from “mutually exclusive categories” (Crenshaw, 1989). Unconscious bias can make it difficult for white feminists to accept that being black, British, female and of faith is a singular identity, although the term “*intersectionality*” denotes the experiences of women whose gender category relate to other disadvantaged social categories (Banton, 2011) hence a discriminatory “*double-whammy*”.

As acknowledged earlier, the notion of self-righteousness, which Falbo & Shepperd, (1986), describe as a belief that one's behaviours or actions are correct compared to that of others; can be used as a means for simplifying and demystifying multiple identities that each have different needs. Arguably this is a necessary process for making sense of the implications of multiple identities from an intersectionality perspective. Furthermore, instead of being perceived perhaps as the kinds of mindset adopted by religious bigots or as the standpoint of the supercilious, instead it is important to recognise that self-righteousness helps to integrate simplification that aids clarity that can promote wellbeing, an ability to cope with adversity while boosting confidence and career success, which would be good for business.



If as argued, discrimination at work is “negatively associated with various indicators of well-being” (Deitch, Barsky, Butz, Chan, Brief & Bradley, 2003), therefore to address it is likely to have the opposite positive effect. The VUCA environment that we live and operate in today, suggests that this is not just an ideology, but a must.

### **7.6.2 Growing interest yet limited written works exist for teaching spirituality**

The literature makes evident that there is growing interest in spirituality in the workplace. Yet limitations still exists regarding written works that focus on teaching spirituality in management programmes and in business organizations. These limitations perhaps give insight to why there is a lack of written works that examine the impact of spirituality on the careers of black British female leaders who become of faith whilst employed in male dominated environments, particularly from the perspective of self-righteousness.

The limitations in written works suggest spirituality as a topic is not one that management programmes tend to consider in any great detail. Consequently, their graduates enter work with serious deficits in their understandings of the multiplicity of personal and professional values (Barnett, Krell, & Sendry, 2000), akin to those predominantly governed by the notion of selfrighteousness. This poses difficulties when the need arises to gain or maintain personal respect, know how to give it, and for leaders to know how best to earn respect from an increasingly diverse workforce to avoid conflict (Wilson, 2012).

### **7.6.3 Recognising the importance of spiritual beliefs to employee well-being**

The subjects’ stories suggest that recognizing the significance of employees’ selfrighteousness and spiritual beliefs is crucial for them to feel respected and that negative emotions, such as anger or anxiety emerges when people have cause for concern (Frijda, 1986). Moreover the research narratives imply a shift in purpose from one based on working to earn a living, to one focused on the need for a career-organization-life that allows spiritual expression that would have a positive impact in the corporate world (Neal, 2000) to flourish.

Workforces today are multifaceted, hence the need for effective diversity management to nurture inclusion and equality. This is subject to acknowledging the relevance of intersectionality particularly in today's increasingly diverse global work environments that now yields those of different cultures, ethnicities, religions and selfrighteous beliefs. As recognised, "It is easy to talk about diversity and equality", words that seem to "roll smoothly off the tongue" (Human Resource Management International Digest, 2006). Nevertheless, "to effect change" it is important to acknowledge that diversity and equality "have become more than honeyed terms" that instead needs to be "lodged in the heart and soul of any organization serious about improving the working lives of female and BME employees" of faith (ibid).

#### **7.6.4 Praying to cope with adversity**

Krause (2003) explored whether praying for others buffers the effects of financial strain on the physical health status of the person offering the prayer. What was revealed was that praying for material things fails to offset the pernicious effects of economic difficulty on health. This further suggests that praying does not make the problem disappear, but instead like selfrighteousness, is a means for coping with it, which helps to manage change in the workplace.

As asserted by Pruzan (cited in Laszlo, 2011), spirituality can be used as a reference point and is worth integrating into personal and organisational behaviour. Furthermore, stories of spirituality in the workplace, is a means for understanding developments in the theory and practice of management that helps to provide renewed insights and greater understanding of the significance of selfrighteousness and intersectionality in the workplace.

These changes show that the world of work is more complicated than one might think. Yet businesses today "fail to recognize that success is best achieved by treating the organization as a complex ecology, whose workings cannot be fully predicted" (Snowden, 1999).

### **7.7 RECOMMENDATIONS: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

*Recognizing and embracing those of spiritual faith*

It would be difficult to address all the recommendations in any great detail here. Nevertheless, these recommendations help to answer earlier questions confirming that it is crucial for business faculties and organizations to acknowledge that, selfrighteousness based on spiritual beliefs of a higher order helps believers of all guises intersectional or otherwise, to cope with workplace challenges. Therefore, benefits can be gained from embracing those of spiritual faith to align personal and corporate vision and to incorporate its teachings in programmes that acknowledge the tenets of spirituality. It was further suggested that a lack of spiritual theoretical works, is perhaps due to an inability to acknowledge its significance and organizational benefits.

*The need to teach spirituality in management to strengthen leaders' minds*

Hopefully universities will be able to associate the teachings of management to spirituality and a higher cause that helps strengthen mindsets (Drucker, 1988). After-all, "humanistic (positive) psychology and integral psychology emphasizes individual and collective strengths" (Fredricson and Losada, 2005) that "enables human goodness and resilience".

A study of African American women leaders, revealed that most of the "participants had strong spiritual beliefs" of selfrighteousness, at the basis of their workplace success (Robinson, 1996) suggesting the benefits that spirituality brings to the workplace.

*Spiritual well-being and a black woman's way of surviving in the workplace*

Reverend Meade utilized her spiritual selfrighteous beliefs that helped her to acknowledge her intersectionality and harmonise her multiple identities that helped to 'feed' her soul giving her the confidence and strength to cope with her workplace challenges and to enable her to achieve success in her male dominated secular surroundings. "Women's experience of working in management has been studied extensively" (Watts, 2009). However, "the particular challenges they face in this role within male-dominated professions merits further attention" (ibid), hence the significance of this study.

As Delher and Welsh, (1986) advised, management needs to address the role that spirituality plays in employees' wellbeing and an organization's

change process. They argued that the “concept of spirituality and selfrighteousness needs to be developed as a kind of positive emotion that serves as a thread connecting the non-rational dimensions of human behaviour, integral to implementing change”. Furthermore, “spirituality enables a business-person to gain a more integrated perspective on their firm” (Cavanagh, 1999).

*Forget political correctness just adopt a respectful mind-set for all!*

A need to adopt a respectful mindset, which Gardner (2007) argues is necessary to respond “sympathetically and constructively to differences extending beyond mere tolerance and political correctness”. This would help to ensure that others are not inflamed by those of difference, do not ignore them, treat them as oddities or for that matter annihilate them for their beliefs (ibid). Instead employers have a moral duty of care to show respect for all their employees (Gardner (2007) in all their guises, making evident their commitment to nurture workplace justice, which Rawls (1999) describes as “the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thoughts”.

This chapter concludes with a final recommendation communicated by Rev. Jessica Meade in the message below that summarises the significance of spirituality today.

*“I believe leaders need to understand how integral an individual’s faith is to their thought process and lifestyles. This has an impact on their ability to perform well and succeed in the workplace. Furthermore, spirituality is inextricably linked to a person’s perception of self and of others”.*

#### 7.8. Reflective Questions

Q1: Do you think there is less or greater acknowledgment of the relevance of spirituality in the workplace today?

Q2: Do you think today’s leaders would find it difficult to manage employees with multiple identities and if so why?

Q3: What does selfrighteous mean from your cultural perspective?

Q4: What would employers need to do to demonstrate that they take issues of faith and intersectionality seriously?

Q5: Is it easier or more difficult to change traditional perceptions of those of spiritual faith?

Q6: What insights did you gain from this chapter?

Q7: Do you think the research subjects' stories regarding their workplace experiences are rare?

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Appendix

Table 1

Table 1: Research interview themes and questions

Research in- terview themes	Type of questions asked
1. Career sec- tor roles and responsibilities	What employment sector do you work in, how long have you been in the field and what were your past roles and roles and responsibilities and what do you do now?
2. Feelings and emotions	How were you affected by your workplace experiences and how did they make you feel?
3. Workplace challenges	Describe the experiences that you found challenged your faith and spiritual beliefs and explain how they manifested?
4. Personal values	What are the things that you value most in life that you regard as significant?
5. How work- place chal- lenges were addressed	How did you respond to your workplace challenges and were you able to address them and if yes how?
6. Ad- vantages of spirituality at work	What would you regard as advantages of maintaining your belief and respect for spirituality at work?
7. Disad- vantages of spirituality at work	What were the disadvantages of being of spiritual belief at work?
8. Perceptions and attitudes	As a spiritual faith believer and leader, how were you perceived by your co-workers, what were their attitudes and how did you perceive their behaviour/interaction towards and with you?
9. Importance of Spirituality at work	Is it important for you to 'live' or practice your spirituality in the workplace and if so why?

Figure 1: Religion by ethnicity England and Wales, 2011



